



# RELATIONS BETWEEN AYUTTHAYA AND RYUKYU

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## Abstract

A number of studies concerning the relations between Ryukyu and Ayutthaya has been conducted by Japanese researchers. However, most of them have focused on Ryukyu's foreign relations and its maritime and trading activities with China, Korea, Japan and the Southeast Asian countries generally.<sup>1</sup> As a result, it is difficult to determine how Ayutthaya responded to this trade as well as its relations with Ryukyu in other spheres. This paper seeks to examine Ayutthaya's foreign relations as seen in Ryukyuan sources, and to consider diplomatic and trade relations with Ryukyu from the viewpoint of Ayutthaya. The formal letters Ayutthaya sent to Ryukyu have been collected in the Ryukyuan document called *Rekidai Hōan* as a principal source. The nature of the officials in charge of the trade, especially their position and rank given in Chinese, are analysed. With respect to trade relations, other written sources and archaeological data regarding Thai ceramics and earthenware found in Okinawa are used to investigate the characteristics of the trade between the two polities.

## Introduction

Relations between Ayutthaya and East Asian countries started when Ayutthaya sent tribute to the Ming in 1371 and subsequently conducted tributary trade throughout the Ming period. At the same time, Ryukyu, which began its tributary relations with the Ming in 1372, started contacts with Southeast Asia in order to gain sappanwood and pepper to present as tribute to the Ming. For more than 200 years afterwards, Ryukyu dispatched ships to major ports in Southeast Asia, bringing Chinese and Japanese merchandise in exchange for local products. From 1420 to 1570 Ryukyu made voyages to the major polities in Southeast Asia, and Ayutthaya was the port Ryukyu ships visited most.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Akiyama 1933, Asato 1967, Kobata 1993 (first published in 1968), Maehira 1981, 1983, Takara 1998 and Murai 2000.

## Ryukyu's trading activities

Since the King of Chuzan, Satsuto, sent the first tributary mission to the Ming in 1372, the Ryukyu kingdom had become a close subordinate member in the Chinese world order, gaining political and commercial recognition from the Ming. The need for local products to pay tribute to the Ming led Ryukyu to begin its foreign relations with Southeast Asia, starting with Ayutthaya in the early fifteenth century.

Ryukyu's formal relations with foreign countries are recorded in a large collection of documents called *Rekidai Hōan* or "The Precious Documents of Successive Generations".<sup>2</sup> This collects diplomatic correspondence with China (during the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties), Korea (during the Chosen dynasty) and Southeast Asian polities between 1424 and 1867.<sup>3</sup> Correspondence with Southeast Asian entities covers Ayutthaya, Palembang, Java, Malacca, Sumatra, Pattani, Annam, and Sunda.<sup>4</sup> Letters from Ryukyu to these countries are believed to have been composed and kept by overseas Chinese who migrated from Fujian and served in the Ryukyu court after the latter half of the fourteenth century.

There are in all 49 documents kept in the records of Ryukyu's correspondence with Ayutthaya. They are written in Chinese in the form of letters and voyage certificates. Envoys who were local officials and overseas Chinese serving as translators and navigators were dispatched along with formal letters and gifts. Ryukyu must have been aware that Ayutthaya was also one of the Ming's tributary countries. The formal letter Ryukyu sent with its envoys often begins with the expression "The King of Chuzan, State of Ryukyu, declares the following

<sup>2</sup> *Rekidai Hōan* comprises four collections; the first, the second, the third and an additional collection. The first collection once had 49 volumes, of which 42 volumes are currently extant. The second collection had 200 volumes, of which 187 volumes remain. The third collection had 13 complete volumes. The additional collection had 4 volumes. Of the 262 volumes in these four collections, 20 volumes have been lost. Texts relating to Ayutthaya and other Southeast Asian polities are included in the first collection.

<sup>3</sup> Japan's direct control of the Kingdom of Ryukyu goes back to 1609 when Satsuma's military invasion of the islands was conducted, whereby the kingdom was made a vassal of Satsuma. However, the Japanese control of the kingdom was not complete, since Ryukyu continued, though secretly, its traditional tributary relations with China even as late as 1874, two years later than its complete incorporation in 1872 as one of the prefectures of Meiji Japan.

<sup>4</sup> Most of the letters called *zi wen* are about Ryukyu's dispatching her envoys to Ayutthaya and requesting smooth trade. The end of each letter includes the list of presents to the king. The letters were sent in the early fifteenth century but after the sixteenth century they were sent as voyage certificates (*ban yin zhi zhao*). In the certificate, the name of ship and the purpose of the dispatch, followed by the number of the certificate, the name of the envoys, the interpreters, the captain and the total number of crew were recorded. The list of presents was not recorded in the certificate but it can be assumed that Ryukyu brought roughly the same items every time a ship was dispatched.

with respect to tributary affairs”.<sup>5</sup> However, a recent study (Murai 2000) has pointed out that Ryukyu’s trade with Ayutthaya was not only to obtain products for its tributary relations with the Ming, but also had the aim of making money. The author based his claim on the letter Ryukyu sent to Ayutthaya in 1425 (text 1-40-01) complaining that the officials of Ayutthaya monopolized the trade of sappanwood and requesting that Ryukyu envoys be allowed to conduct free trade with local merchants. The same letter also points out that Ayutthaya’s foreign trade activities had been controlled by court officials since the early fifteenth century. The officials in charge could be *Phra Khlang*, ministers of foreign affairs and trade (Ishii 1992, 1994).

According to other texts in *Rekidai Hōan*, Ryukyu also began trade with other countries in Southeast Asia, for example with Palembang, beginning in 1428, and Java, beginning in 1430. Malacca became a frequent trading partner during the latter half of the fifteenth century before it was conquered by the Portuguese in 1511. Using letters and voyage certificates sent between 1425 and 1570, Ryukyu is seen to have dispatched a total of 64 ships to Ayutthaya, 20 to Malacca, six to Java, four to Palembang, and three to Sumatra. After 1490, 11 ships were dispatched to Pattani, one to Vietnam (Annam) and two to Sunda. Kobata has pointed out, in relation to the ships sent to Ayutthaya, that trade activities between the two courts may have begun in the 1390s, since the gifts that Ryukyu presented to the Ming and the Korean Chosen dynasty included sappanwood and pepper (Kobata 1993, 431–445). Kobata has also estimated that Ryukyu may have dispatched as many as 150 ships to Ayutthaya given the fact that some documents from the years 1443–63 and 1470–1508 are missing (Kobata 1993, 445).

With each voyage, Ryukyu brought different kinds of gifts to Ayutthaya, namely silk, satin, porcelain of different sizes from China, and swords, paper fans and sulfur from Japan. The amounts of items are almost the same; 25 bolts of satin, 2,500–3,000 *chin* (1 *chin* = 600g.) of sulfur, five swords, 30 paper fans, 400 big “blue” vases and 2,000 small “blue” bowls. The term “blue” translates from Chinese characters; in fact the vases and bowls are greenish-blue, and do not refer to blue-and-white wares. These products indicate that Ryukyu had trading activities with its neighboring countries. Ryukyu’s intermediary trade between East Asia and the Southeast Asia regions was made easy because the Ming banned private connections between Chinese merchants and foreigners, known as “the ban

<sup>5</sup> For example, the first letter Ryukyu sent to Ayutthaya in the year 1425 (text 1-40-01). There are many annotated versions of the text such as the one collected in *Nahashi Shi* (The History of Naha City) published in 1974–1986 and the recent one published by the Okinawa Prefecture Education Committee. This paper uses the latter version translated and annotated by Wada Hisanori (Wada 1997). The numbers of the texts used in this paper such as 1-40-01 are according to this version. The English translated version of the text is from Kobata and Matsuda 1969.

on overseas voyages and trade” from 1368 to 1567. Because of this ban, Chinese merchandise was allowed to be exported only by means of formal or tribute trade with the Ming. Ryukyu’s maritime trade was actively conducted until the dynasty was conquered by the Daimyo of Satsuma from the southern part of Japan in 1609 (see note 3 above, however).

### Ayutthaya’s relations with Ryukyu

While Ryukyu actively conducted its trade with Ayutthaya, what was Ayutthaya’s policy towards its counterpart? This will be discussed in the light of the letters Ayutthaya sent to Ryukyu found in *Rekidai Hōan* and other related sources.

Although there are 51 letters from Ryukyu to Ayutthaya in *Rekidai Hōan*, there are only seven from Ayutthaya addressed to the king and officials of Ryukyu. All of them are written in Chinese. The first one is a reply to King Chuzan written in 1430, stating that Ayutthaya would send the Ryukyu envoy back to Ryukyu as soon as the trading was completed. The rest are about the shipwreck of an Ayutthayan vessel near Ryukyu in 1479–80. A summary of the seven letters is shown in Table 1.

The texts 1-39-11 to 1-39-17 all concern the shipwreck of the chief envoy *Nai Men Ying Xie Tie*, or Nai Boonhiang Chaota<sup>6</sup> and others. The only differences are the sender of the letter and the presenter of the gifts listed at the end of each letter. The officials who sent the letters, such as *Li pu shang shu Wu Ba Luo Mo Ci Sa Tuo Lie* in text 1-39-12, *Chang Zhe Nai Luo Si li* in text 1-39-13, and *Chang Shi Xiao Na Yue Ben* in text 1-39-14, seem to be of high rank, according to the version in English of Kobata and Matsuda (1969). Their names are found as the sender of the letter and in the list of those who presented the gifts to Ryukyu. The last two letters (1-39-16, -17) were sent by the king of Ayutthaya<sup>7</sup> to the king of Ryukyu and were issued on the same day, month, and year. Both letters are nearly identical, but they were sent via different envoys dispatched from Ryukyu. These six letters with similar content and sent within the same two years imply that this accident and the attempt to search for survivors was an important issue for both courts, and that Ayutthaya greatly appreciated Ryukyu’s cooperation. In this kind of formal correspondence Ayutthaya’s diplomatic strategy towards Ryukyu can be seen.

<sup>6</sup> The transliteration of the name of Ayutthaya’s officials from Chinese to English is as referenced in Kobata and Matsuda 1969, 84–5.

<sup>7</sup> The name of the king is not recorded, but Kobata and Matsuda (1969, 83) assumed that the king during this period might have been Phra Ramesuan, or Pharamatilokanath (King Borom Trailokanath).

### The position of officials

The rank *Li pu shang shu* prefixing the title *Wu Ba Luo Mo Ci Sa Tuo Lie* (Oc Phra Maha Suwanarath) is found in text 1-39-12. Kobata has translated *li pu* as “Minister of the Board of Rites”, one of the six ministers in charge of central administration in the Ming period (Kobata and Matsuda 1969,86–92). *Shang shu* refers to a rank of officials responsible for arranging and drafting formal documents for the emperor since the Ch’in and Han periods and, in the Ming period, held posts as ministers in the Grand Secretariat (Hucker 1985,72). So the sender of this letter could be the one in charge of writing letters in the Ayutthayan court. This is also true for *chang zhe* prefixing *Nai Luo Si Li* in text 1-39-13 and *chang shi* prefixing *Xiao Nai Yue Ben* in text 1-39-14, both of which equals “Senior Minister”. The rank, however, does not make clear which minister it is. These ranks are obviously the ranks of officials in the Ming Dynasty, but it does not mean that the duties and positions of those concerned were the same as those in the Ming. The rank “Senior Minister” that Kobata translated from *chang shi* may appear to be a high rank. However, according to text 1-39-12 which lists the name of presenters of gifts to Ryukyu, “Senior Minister Nai Itsupun” is written last among the other officials (see also Table 2). Consequently, his actual rank in the Ayutthayan court might be less grand than it appears in its English version.

### The given rank of officials

There are titles *wu ba luo*, *mao kun*, *kun*, *xiao nai*, *nai* following the rank. The title *wu ba luo*, according to Higashi-onna is “Oc-Phra”, *mao kun* is “Okun”, while *kun* equates to “Khun”. The title *xiao nai* is transliterated “Chao nai” (but Kobata transliterates it only as “Nai”) and *nai* as “Nai”. Another title *xie ti* as a suffix to the name *Nai Men Ying* (Nai Boonhiang) is seen in text 1-39-11 and 1-39-14, being a chief envoy who was dispatched to accompany Ryukyu envoys back to their country. It is transliterated “Chaota”. With respect to the term *Nai*, Higashi-onna (1941,31–4) states that it is used for persons without titles, making it equal to “Mr” (Higashi-onna 1941,31–4).

However, this term appears in Chinese documents beginning in the late fourteenth century and is likely to have more significance than Higashi-onna has indicated. According to a Korean document *The Chronicles of Li Dynasty*, an envoy from Ayutthaya named *Nai Zhang Si Dao* was dispatched to Korea with 20 other people in 1393. At the end of the text, there is a note saying “Nai is a name of

court official of that country”.<sup>8</sup> In *The Chronicles of the Ming Dynasty*, envoys who were dispatched to the Ming during the same period also had this title. For example, there is *Nai tie xie ti* who was sent as an envoy to the Ming in the fourth month of 1477, and *Kun Wang Qun Xie Ti* in the seventh month in 1482. Considering his position as envoy to Korea and the Ming, “Nai” is not just a word proceeding a person’s name, it possibly was a significant title in the early period of Ayutthaya.

Most of these interpretations, especially the rank of officials, are accepted and have been followed by later researchers. However, there are some disagreements in recent studies. For example, in the case of the word *xie ti* which is transliterated *Chaota*, or officials from different nations responsible for port affairs. Wada (1997, 353) has argued that *Chaota* is a term used after the seventeenth century when ships from many countries including European ones called at Ayutthaya, and that it may have a different meaning in *Rekidai Hōan* which was written in an earlier period. This argument appears even more reasonable when another related source is considered. According to a Chinese document called “Xianluo-guan-I-yü”, a glossary of Chinese-Thai vocabularies written in the Ming and Ch’ing periods, *Xie Ti* is transliterated *Setti*, the meaning of which is likely to be a position of court official of Ayutthaya rather than “millionaire” as in today’s definition.<sup>9</sup>

### The Chinese language used in the letters

Not only are these letters written in formal Chinese, the term used in addressing the receiver also varies, depending on the respective ranks of the sender and the receiver. Texts 1-39-11, -16 and -17 are replies of the king of Ayutthaya to the king of Ryukyu. In the text, the word *zi hui* occurs; another word meaning “reply”, is used. *Zi* is the term used in the correspondence between officials of equal rank, for example, between the king of Ryukyu and officials in Fukien or between the king of Ryukyu and the Board of Rites of the Ming. This is because the Ming regarded Ryukyu as one of its tributary lands, as subordinate as other official bodies. So the fact that Ayutthaya used this term with Ryukyu implies that Ayutthaya was aware that the kings of both courts held the same rank in the Ming tribute system.

<sup>8</sup> *The Chronicles of the Li Dynasty* (the sixth month of the second year of Taiso 1393), quoted in Wada 1997, 353.

<sup>9</sup> This glossary of vocabulary is recorded in a large collection of a dictionary of Chinese and foreign vocabularies called “Hua-I I-yü” published in *Beijing tushu guan gu ji zhen ben cong kan*, Beijing 1987–1994.

In the text 1-39-12, when Oc Phra Maha Suwannarath addressed to the king of Ryukyu, he used the word *qi* which means to report to or to address someone of a higher rank, including the empress, or the crown prince. Even though the title of Oc Phra Maha Suwannarath is translated as Minister of the Board of Rites, it cannot be seen as having the same meaning, or the same rank, as that of the Ming. This is because the Minister of the Board of Rites of the Ming had a rank equal to that of the king of Ryukyu, so the letters between them use *zi* – correspondence between officials of equal rank, not *qi*. The letter from Oc Phra that is expressed in *qi* thus implies that his rank is inferior to that of his counterpart.

From the ranks, titles and expressions used in these letters, it can be seen that the officials in charge of Ryukyu's relations were overseas Chinese who understood the Chinese administrative system and were aware of the official ranks of Ayutthaya and Ryukyu in the tribute system.

### Gifts from Ayutthaya

According to the formal letters that Ryukyu sent to Ayutthaya, the main purpose of the Ryukyuan voyages was to purchase sappanwood and pepper. However, the merchandise sent from Ayutthaya actually varied from that which was recorded. For example, the gifts that the king and his officials sent to Ryukyu as a gesture of gratitude for bringing back the shipwreck survivors included several kinds of cloth, rose water, a large amount of sappanwood and wine as shown in Table 2.

Apart from local products such as sappanwood and wine, there were exported products such as rose water from West Asia and cloth from Persia and India. While the origin of “red cloth”, the gift from the king of Ayutthaya recorded in text 1-39-11, is not clear, Wada (1997, 339–40) maintains that the “red-chained pattern cloth” or “green-chained pattern cloth” in the text 1-39-12 and 1-39-14 could be from Persia while the “red western cloth” might be woven cloth from Calicut in India. According to a record in *The Chronicles of the Li Dynasty* written in 1479, Ryukyu's market had many kinds of textiles, some of which were from India. From this document, it can be inferred that Ryukyu imported a large amount of cloth from West Asia as well as forest products from Southeast Asia. There is, however, no evidence of any Ryukyu voyage to Persia or India, so it is apparent that products from these regions were imported through Ayutthaya. These products were probably unrecorded because they were not sent in tribute to the Ming.

What is noteworthy here is the “red and white wine made from fragrant flowers”, which totalled more than 70 jars. Wine seems to have been a common gift from Ayutthaya even prior to the period under consideration. In 1438, an official of Ryukyu sent a reply to an Ayutthaya official named *Zhang Ren Mi Zan Zhi*

*Dao*, stating that Ryukyu received a letter and two jars of wine and they were immediately sent to a high official called Oso Kaiki. Oso, being content with the present, gave 150 pieces of lacquerware in return to *Zhang Ren Mi Zan Zhi Dao*.<sup>10</sup> Oso is said to be the leader of the overseas Chinese in Ryukyu and conducted trade with the Chinese merchants in Palembang (Maehira 1983, 30). We do not know specifically who *Zhang Ren Mi Zan Zhi Dao* was or what position he had in the court in Ayutthaya, but he might be a Chinese official. Because this letter is a reply from Ryukyu, we know that he had previously sent a letter to a Ryukyu official or possibly to Oso who was also Chinese, even though the letter was not preserved in *Rekidai Hōan*.

### Trade relations

The *Rekidai Hōan* is an important source for studying the relations between Ryukyu and Ayutthaya. However, the document collects only formal letters between the kings and high-ranking officials, and most of those are letters sent from the Ryukyu court. Thus, it tends to present a picture of one-way trade from Ryukyu. However, the fact that the letters from Ayutthaya are few compared with those from Ryukyu does not mean that there were no ships coming from Ayutthaya. Other sources cited below provide information about Ayutthayan vessels making voyages to Ryukyu.

According to *The Chronicles of the Ming Dynasty*, in the ninth month of the year 1404, the Fujian Provincial Administration Commissioner reported to the Emperor Yung Lo that they had found a foreign ship that had reached Fujian. After questioning, it was found to be a ship from Ayutthaya bound for Ryukyu. The emperor, saying that it was beneficial for barbarian countries to have friendly ties, ordered the commissioner to repair the ship, give those on board food and let them return to their country or sail to Ryukyu as they wished.

It seems that ships from Ayutthaya began to sail to East Asia from the end of the fourteenth century. A Korean source *Various Records on the Korai Dynasty* mentions a ship from Ayutthaya bound for Korea under the Gao Li dynasty (981-1392) in 1388 but adds that it met with a typhoon and drifted to Japan, where it stayed for one year before returning to Korea. As stated earlier, *The Chronicle of the Li Dynasty* also records an envoy from Ayutthaya, *Nai Zhang Si Dao*, who was dispatched to Korea and Japan in 1393. Even though these records are not about a voyage of an Ayutthayan ship to Ryukyu, we know that ships from Ayutthaya had been dispatched to countries in East Asia from the end of the fourteenth century. Another Korean document called *Records on Eastern Sea Countries* written in

<sup>10</sup> This letter is recorded in *Rekidai Hōan*, text 1-43-17 (Wada 1997,463-4).



1471 by a Korean scholar Shin Suku Chu noted that the port of Ryukyu was visited by ships from Japan and “Southern barbarian countries”, which could have included Ayutthaya.<sup>11</sup> Apart from the written sources already mentioned, the key to understanding the trade activities of both entities is archaeological data from Okinawa about Thai ceramics.

### Thai ceramics excavated in Okinawa

While Chinese porcelain was the main product Ryukyu brought to Ayutthaya and other Southeast Asian polities, many examples of Thai ceramics, together with Vietnamese pieces, have been found at several archaeological sites in Okinawa. Even though there are few compared to the Chinese porcelain items, these archaeological artifacts are the key to understanding the pattern of trade at that time.

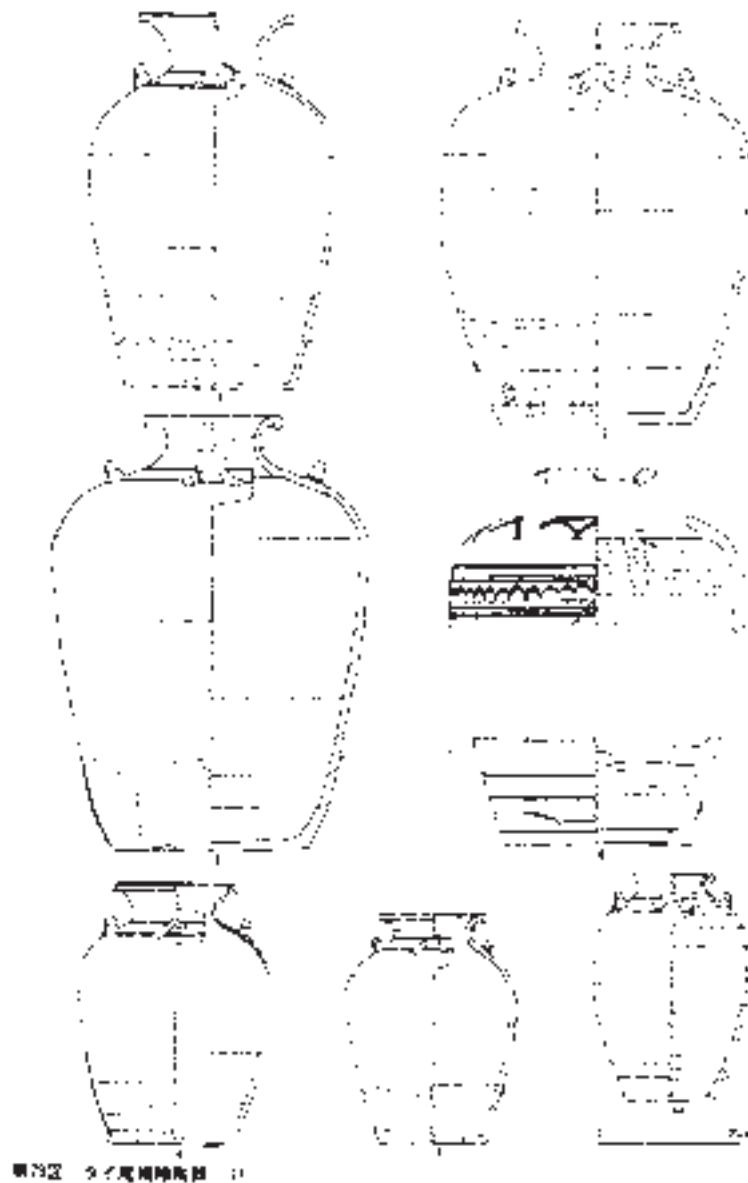
Over the past 20 years, there has been progress in the archaeological surveys of Southeast Asian ceramics found in Japan. Among all the historical sites in Japan (such as Nagasaki, Fukuoka and Osaka), Okinawa, especially the main island, is the place where the most Thai ceramics have been excavated.<sup>12</sup> Most of the pieces are earthenware lids and dark brown glazed jars with four lugs. The rest are small covered jars and bowls. These earthenware and stoneware items were made in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; some even date back to the latter half of the fourteenth century (Kin 1991, 98). According to a survey from the Okinawa Prefecture Education Committee, Thai wares have been excavated from 18 historical sites in Okinawa, mostly in three major sites that once were castles; Kokijin castle in the north, Katsuren castle in the center, and especially Shuri castle in the south, the palace and capital of the Ryukyu dynasty. According to the recent survey of *Kyō no Uchi*, the shrine in the southwestern part of the inner courtyard of Shuri castle, many remains of jars, lids and pots from Siam have been found. A total of 285 pieces of the remains of dark brown glazed jars, mostly the mouths of the jars, have been excavated. The mouths are 7 to 25 cm. in diameter, and the heights range from 8 to 55 cm. These jars are categorized into eight types, according to the shapes of the mouths. Most are believed to be large-sized jars (Figure 1). Earthenware lids, numbering 63 pieces, from 10 to 16 cm. in diameter and 3 to 5 cm. in height have been excavated, whereas only four pieces of earthenware pots have been found (Okinawa Prefecture 1998, 215–9). The fact that there were many more lids than pots implies that they were not sets. The lids may have been used to cover something else.

<sup>11</sup> This document has been translated into Japanese with annotations by Tanaka (1991). The note about the Ryukyu port is in pages 236–7.

<sup>12</sup> The Okinawa Prefecture comprises many islands such as Okinawa (the main and the largest), Miyako, Ishigaki, and Iriomote.



Figure 1 Dark brown jars with four lugs excavated in Okinawa (Shuri Castle)

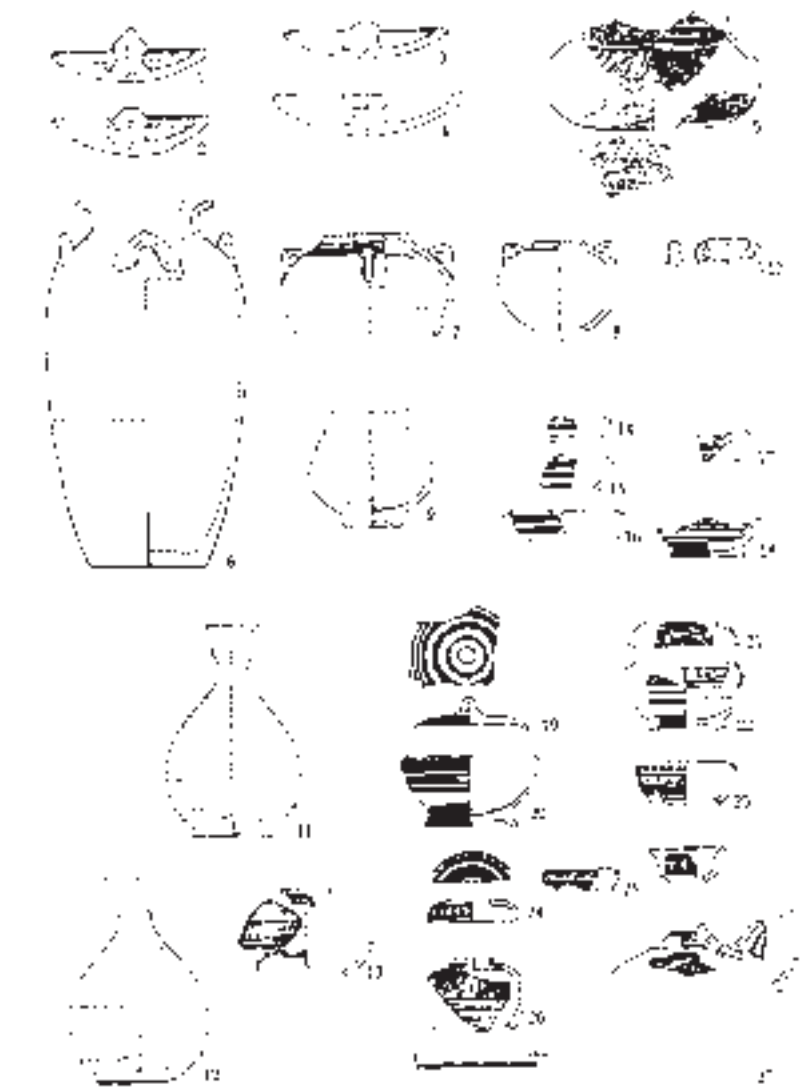


Source: Okinawa Prefecture Education Committee "Shuri Castle Site-excavation survey no. 1" 1999





Figure 2 Various kinds of Thai ceramics excavated in Okinawa



150 151 152 153 154 155 156 157 158 159 160 161 162 163 164 165 166 167 168 169 170 171 172 173 174 175 176 177 178 179 180 181 182 183 184 185 186 187 188 189 190 191 192 193 194 195 196 197 198 199 200 201 202 203 204 205 206 207 208 209 210 211 212 213 214 215 216 217 218 219 220 221 222 223 224 225 226 227 228 229 230 231 232 233 234 235 236 237 238 239 240 241 242 243 244 245 246 247 248 249 250 251 252 253 254 255 256 257 258 259 260 261 262 263 264 265 266 267 268 269 270 271 272 273 274 275 276 277 278 279 280 281 282 283 284 285 286 287 288 289 290 291 292 293 294 295 296 297 298 299 300 301 302 303 304 305 306 307 308 309 310 311 312 313 314 315 316 317 318 319 320 321 322 323 324 325 326 327 328 329 330 331 332 333 334 335 336 337 338 339 340 341 342 343 344 345 346 347 348 349 350 351 352 353 354 355 356 357 358 359 360 361 362 363 364 365 366 367 368 369 370 371 372 373 374 375 376 377 378 379 380 381 382 383 384 385 386 387 388 389 390 391 392 393 394 395 396 397 398 399 400 401 402 403 404 405 406 407 408 409 410 411 412 413 414 415 416 417 418 419 420 421 422 423 424 425 426 427 428 429 430 431 432 433 434 435 436 437 438 439 440 441 442 443 444 445 446 447 448 449 450 451 452 453 454 455 456 457 458 459 460 461 462 463 464 465 466 467 468 469 470 471 472 473 474 475 476 477 478 479 480 481 482 483 484 485 486 487 488 489 490 491 492 493 494 495 496 497 498 499 500 501 502 503 504 505 506 507 508 509 510 511 512 513 514 515 516 517 518 519 520 521 522 523 524 525 526 527 528 529 530 531 532 533 534 535 536 537 538 539 540 541 542 543 544 545 546 547 548 549 550 551 552 553 554 555 556 557 558 559 560 561 562 563 564 565 566 567 568 569 570 571 572 573 574 575 576 577 578 579 580 581 582 583 584 585 586 587 588 589 590 591 592 593 594 595 596 597 598 599 600 601 602 603 604 605 606 607 608 609 610 611 612 613 614 615 616 617 618 619 620 621 622 623 624 625 626 627 628 629 630 631 632 633 634 635 636 637 638 639 640 641 642 643 644 645 646 647 648 649 650 651 652 653 654 655 656 657 658 659 660 661 662 663 664 665 666 667 668 669 670 671 672 673 674 675 676 677 678 679 680 681 682 683 684 685 686 687 688 689 690 691 692 693 694 695 696 697 698 699 700 701 702 703 704 705 706 707 708 709 710 711 712 713 714 715 716 717 718 719 720 721 722 723 724 725 726 727 728 729 730 731 732 733 734 735 736 737 738 739 740 741 742 743 744 745 746 747 748 749 750 751 752 753 754 755 756 757 758 759 760 761 762 763 764 765 766 767 768 769 770 771 772 773 774 775 776 777 778 779 780 781 782 783 784 785 786 787 788 789 790 791 792 793 794 795 796 797 798 799 800 801 802 803 804 805 806 807 808 809 810 811 812 813 814 815 816 817 818 819 820 821 822 823 824 825 826 827 828 829 830 831 832 833 834 835 836 837 838 839 840 841 842 843 844 845 846 847 848 849 850 851 852 853 854 855 856 857 858 859 860 861 862 863 864 865 866 867 868 869 870 871 872 873 874 875 876 877 878 879 880 881 882 883 884 885 886 887 888 889 890 891 892 893 894 895 896 897 898 899 900 901 902 903 904 905 906 907 908 909 910 911 912 913 914 915 916 917 918 919 920 921 922 923 924 925 926 927 928 929 930 931 932 933 934 935 936 937 938 939 940 941 942 943 944 945 946 947 948 949 950 951 952 953 954 955 956 957 958 959 960 961 962 963 964 965 966 967 968 969 970 971 972 973 974 975 976 977 978 979 980 981 982 983 984 985 986 987 988 989 990 991 992 993 994 995 996 997 998 999 1000

Source: Kin Sei-ji "Thai and Vietnamese ceramics excavated in Okinawa." Paper presented at the Symposium on Southeast Asian Archaeology 2004 "Interrelations between Kyushu and Southeast Asia" (Japan Society for Southeast Asian Archaeology) p. 17



Kin (1991, 83–98) claims that the jars with four lugs were brought as wine containers sent as presents from Ayutthaya, recorded in *Rekidai Hōan* as “white (or red) wine made from fragrant flowers”, and the earthenware lids were the covers of the jars. This suggestion is reasonable, but these kinds of large jars may have held other kinds of merchandise, or the jars themselves could have been brought as merchandise.

It is worth noting here that there are also remains of small-sized pieces. For example, there are small-sized covered boxes with floral designs, jars with two lugs and kendi (Figure 2). Compared with the numbers of earthenware lids and dark brown glazed jars, few examples of these ceramics have been found. Eighteen boxes, five covers, one jar and one kendi have been excavated, mostly in Kokijin castle (Kin 2004, 70). Obviously, these pieces were not containers but the products themselves. This poses the question: by whom and via what route were they brought to Ryukyu?

There are many possible answers to this question. The first one is the direct route from Ayutthaya. The written sources other than *Rekidai Hōan* indicate that there were ships from Ayutthaya to Korea, Japan and Ryukyu beginning in the second half of the fourteenth century. Thus, it is possible that ships from Ayutthaya also came to Ryukyu and brought these ceramics along with other kinds of merchandise. Ceramics from Ayutthaya’s ships may not have been limited to domestic items only but may have included some from Vietnam as well. According to recent surveys from shipwrecks near the Gulf of Thailand, for instance the Sri Chang 3 shipwreck, Ao Thai 1 shipwreck and the Sattaheep shipwreck, a large number of Thai stoneware items has been found along with Vietnamese ones. Since around 70 percent of the ceramics are Thai, the ships are believed to have been from Siam and sunk between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Jaruk 1992). From this evidence, it is obvious that ceramics were important trade goods between Ayutthaya and Vietnam at that time. Thus, it can be speculated that Ayutthaya brought Thai and Vietnamese ceramics together with other domestic products, such as sappanwood, to Ryukyu and other polities nearby.

Another possible route by which these ceramics may have been brought to Ryukyu is from Ayutthaya via the southern ports of China, such as Canton and Fujian, to Ryukyu by private Chinese vessels. Breaking the Ming’s ban on overseas travel, Chinese merchants had been secretly making voyages to Southeast Asia and Japan, and their illegal trade had become more active in the beginning of the fifteenth century. Japanese pirate vessels that sailed between Kyushu in Japan, southeastern China and major ports in Southeast Asia could be considered here as well.

By whichever route or whichever vessels these ceramics were brought, these artifacts indicate that the trade between Ayutthaya and Ryukyu was not limited only to the formal kind, by means of which products from Ayutthaya were shipped for Ryukyu's tributary goods, as seen in *Rekidai Hōan*. It widens our view of trade relations at that time that also included private trade among merchants. In addition, the fact that the ceramics are scattered throughout many sites in Okinawa could signify that they were part of transactions not only with the central government but also with the local powers and ports in the northern and the southern regions of Okinawa.

While the jars (generally called Sawankalok) are believed to have been produced at the Si Satchanalai kilns, the earthenware-like lids and pots are held to be from kilns in the Ayutthaya region (Kin1991, 99; Morimura 1995, 66–71). According to a comparison of the ceramics excavated in Okinawa with those found in other Japanese sites, one characteristic can be noted here: those items in Okinawa are mostly from the Si Satchanalai kilns while the others, such as those excavated from Nagasaki, or Osaka (Sakai city), are from the Noi River kilns in Singburi province. It is thought that porcelain pieces from the Noi River kilns are mostly the four-lug jars brought to Japan as containers of goods.<sup>13</sup> Wares similar to those items excavated in Okinawa have also been found at many archaeological sites in the Philippines and Indonesia. Therefore Okinawa can be considered another destination of Si Satchanalai ceramics during its peak of production and export in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

### The role of overseas Chinese

Diplomatic and trade relations between Ayutthaya and the Ryukyu court could not have been possible without the intermediate role of the Chinese officials. Those at the Ryukyu court were dispatched to Ayutthaya as translators and sometimes as chief envoys.

According to *Rekidai Hōan*, the interpreters who were dispatched to each port in Southeast Asia came from 15 clans, including Zheng, Liang, Cai, Gao, Lin, Hong. Despite the linguistic differences among Southeast Asia polities, Ryukyu dispatched the same interpreters to different places. For example, Hong Ying, who was sent to Siam in 1464 (text 1-41-04), was sent to Sumatra in 1467 and 1468. Gao He, who was sent to Malacca in 1509 (text 1-42-03) and 1511 (text 1-42-07), was also sent to Ayutthaya many times during the same period. Why were these Chinese-migrant officials sent to ports in Southeast Asia where different languages

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<sup>13</sup> For surveys of Thai ceramics found in Hakata, see Arishima 1991; in Osaka (Sakai) see Tsuzuki 1989; surveys on Thai ceramics found in Japan as a whole, see Morimura 1995, Morimoto 2000.

prevailed? Maehira (1983, 46) has pointed out that this was possible because Ryukyu utilized the network of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and developed trading activities by using Chinese as the main language of communication. In the case of Ayutthaya and Ryukyu, considering the trade activities that both entities engaged in for over two hundred years, it is also likely that Chinese migrants in both regions were closely connected, since they shared the same language and culture.

Similarly in the case of Ayutthaya, *Nai Yung*, one of Ayutthaya's dispatches who was sent as a translator to escort Ryukyu envoys back to their country, and *Nai Noi* in the text 1-39-11 and 1-39-14 in 1480, are likely to have been Chinese. As noted above, the ranks of officials in Ayutthaya in Chinese borrowed titles from the Ming and the use of Chinese in the letters reveals that Ayutthaya employed Chinese officials in its connections with Ryukyu. Another example will give a clearer picture of the overseas Chinese connection within Southeast Asia.

In a letter from Oso Kaiki, a Chinese leader in Ryukyu, to an official in Palembang written in 1428, it is stated that Ryukyu received a request from a commissioner of Kyushu Shibukawa Michiyori in the year 1421 to send back a group of 20 people from Palembang, who arrived at Satsuma (or Kagoshima, a southern prefecture in Kyushu island). Ryukyu, however, lacked a navigator who could sail to Palembang, sent them back with Ryukyu envoys who were dispatched to Ayutthaya. From Ayutthaya, Ryukyu requested these people be sent back to Palembang. It is not known if they reached their destination.<sup>14</sup>

Palembang is a port near the southeastern coast of Sumatra. It was once the center of the Srivijaya kingdom during the latter half of the seventh century to the fourteenth century. After Srivijaya was conquered by Majaphahit, Palembang was ruled by group of Chinese who migrated from Canton and Fujian during the first half of the fifteenth century (Wada 1997, 456–7). Since the incident related above, trade activities between Ryukyu and Palembang were said to have started. Maehira (1983, 30) pointed out that the route from Japan to Palembang via Ryukyu and Ayutthaya was possible because a network of Chinese was already established at that time. This example shows that the role of the overseas Chinese in Ayutthaya was not only to serve the court in diplomacy and commerce, but that they linked with other polities as well. Even though the details of how Palembang crews were sent home from Ayutthaya are not known, this indicates that trading route between Ayutthaya and Palembang had existed as early as the fifteenth century.

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<sup>14</sup> In this letter, Oso sent a ship with gifts to Palembang and asked for smooth trade (*Rekidai Hōan*, text 1-43-04, pp. 453–454).

## Summary

From the analysis of the relations between Ayutthaya and Ryukyu in *Rekidai Hōan*, other related sources and archaeological data, we know how close their relationship was for more than 200 years. We can also discern something of the structure of officialdom of the Ayutthaya court. Among those in charge of the relations with East Asia were Chinese who had a good knowledge of writing formal Chinese letters, and were well aware of the official status of both Ryukyu and Ayutthaya in the Chinese world order. The positions and different ranks of Ayutthaya official that appear in the letters sent to Ryukyu in 1480 could be the result of administrative reform during the reign of King Borom Trailokanath (1448–1488).

The gifts that each official presented to the king and officials of Ryukyu, which included Persian and Indian products, indicates that Ayutthaya had trade relations with Persia and India from the fifteenth century on, before the period of King Narai, when trade with India was known to have flourished. From the large quantity of wine which Ayutthaya presented as return gifts to Ryukyu, it is clear that wine was one of the exports at that time. Likewise, Thai ceramics excavated in many historical sites in Okinawa, provide evidence of trade, possibly private, from Ayutthaya, though not recorded in formal sources.

Also of significance here is the role of the overseas Chinese. The incidents of the boat crews from Palembang being sent back from Japan via Ryukyu and Ayutthaya in 1421, and the shipwreck of Ayutthayan envoys in 1480, indicate the important role of the overseas Chinese in Ryukyu, Ayutthaya and Palembang and their inter-regional connections. Their relations with Ryukyu help us understand the characteristics of Ayutthaya's foreign relations and the emergence of an overseas Chinese society during the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries.

**Table 1** Letters from Ayutthaya addressed to Ryukyu

Text no.	Date of issue	sender (in English)	Receiver	Content
1-39-01	1430/3/21	Xian luo guo Ayutthaya	King Chuzan	We will send the Ryukyu envoy back to Ryukyu as soon as possible
1-39-11	1480/3/23	Xian luo gu wang Ayutthaya King	The king	Your envoy Tamanafa was dispatched here but lost the ship and property. We sent Chief Envoy Nai Boonhiang Chaota, Vice Envoy Nai Chuen Chaota, Interpreter Nai Yung and others, to take our local products and accompany your envoys back. When the ship approached Ryukyu, however, she encountered a storm and sank into the sea, causing death and loss of property. If there are survivors, we ask you to kindly send them back home. We received your envoy Tara, interpreter Ko Kin and others and received your gifts. We are now dispatching Nai Noi with three native seamen to accompany your envoys to your country.
1-39-12	1480/3/23	Li pu shang shu Wu Ba Luo Mo Ci Sa Tuo Lie Minister of the Board of Rites Oc Phra Maha Suwannarath	The king	Same as above. In the end of the letter; return presents from Oc Phra Maha Suwannarath, Oc Khun Pituk, Nai Kosa, Senior Minister Nai Ittupun are listed.
1-39-13	1480/4/12	Chang zhe Nai Luo Si Li Senior Minister Nai Lo-ssu-li	Not recorded	Long live the king of your country. We wanted to send our men to express our appreciation of your favors, but we have no wise men who are familiar with the navigation to offer our appreciation. We now present one jar of white wine and one of red wine and entrust them to the ship that has come here.
1-39-14	Not recorded	Chang shi Xiao Na Yue Ben Senior Minister Nai Ittupun	Not recorded	Last year your ship came here but it was destroyed by fire and everything was lost. Such is the will of Heaven. The king of this country had dispatched Nai Boonhiang Chaota as Chief Envoy, Nai Chuen Chaota as Vice Envoy and Nai Yung as Interpreter to escort Chief Envoy Tamanafa and others back to their country, carrying some presents. Because of the unfavorable weather, however, they came back and were detained during the winter. They are now about to depart. You have again dispatched Chief Envoy Nishi, Interpreter Tei Raku and others, who brought presents. We present our return gifts from Oc Phra Maha Suwannarath, Khun Pituk, Nai Kosa, and Chief Envoy Nai Boonhiang Chaota.
1-39-16	1481/3/15	Xian luo gua wang The king	The king	Your envoy Uchima and others came to our country escorting Nai Noi and three native guards. We have received your gifts and entrusted our trifling presents to these returning envoys to be given to Your Majesty by way of returning our thanks.
1-39-17	1481/3/15	Xian luo gua wang The king	Not recorded	We now report the departure of the envoy Nishi and would like to offer our return presents.

Source: *Rekidai Hōan* in Wada 1997.



**Table 2** Gifts from Ayutthaya to Ryukyu in *Rekidai Hōan*

Text no.	Sender	Gifts	Number
1-39-01	Not recorded	Sappanwood	3,000 <i>chin</i>
1-39-11	The king	Sappanwood Red cloth Sappanwood	3,000 <i>chin</i> 14 bolts 20,000 <i>chin</i>
1-39-12	1. Minister of the Board of Rites Oc Phra Maha Suwannarath	Red chain-patterned cloth	1 bolt
“	“	Rose-water	5 jars
“	“	Red wine made from fragrant flowers	3 jars
		Sappanwood	1,000 <i>chin</i>
	2. Oc Khun Pituk	Red Western cloth	2 bolts
		Rose-water	2 jars
		Red wine made from fragrant flowers	3 jars
	3. Nai Gou Kosa	Yellow cotton cloth with colored silks woven into it	1 bolt
		Sappanwood	600 <i>chin</i>
	4. Senior Minister Nai Ittupun	Red wine made from fragrant flowers	1 jar
		Sappanwood	400 <i>chin</i>
1-39-13	Nai Lo-Su-li	White wine made from fragrant flowers	1 jar
		Red wine	1 jar
1- 39-14	1. Oc Phra Maha Suwannarath	Green chain-patterned cloth	1 bolt
	2. Oc Khun Pituk	Wine	1 jar
	3. Nai Gou Kosa	Cloth	10 bolts
	4. Chief envoy Nai Boonhiang Chaota	White wine made from fruits	21 jars
		Red wine made from fruits	29 jars
1-39-16	The king	Sappanwood	3,000 <i>chin</i>
		Red cloth	14 bolts
		Wine with fragrant flowers and coconut in it	1 jar
		Wine made from fragrant flowers	5 jars
1-39-17	The king	Sappanwood	3,000 <i>chin</i>
		Red cloth	14 bolts
		Wine with fragrant flowers and coconut in it	2 jars
		Wine made from fragrant flowers	5 jars

## Appendix : Names, titles, documents, places

Ban yin zhi zhao (voyage certificate)	半印執照
Cai (person's name)	蔡
Chang Shi Xiao Nai Yue Ben (Senior Minister Nai Itsupon)	長史蕭奈悅本
Chang Zhe Nai Luo Si Li (Senior Minister Nai Luo Si Li)	長者奈羅思利
Gao (person's name)	高
Gao He (person's name)	高賀
Hong (person's name)	紅
Hong ying (person's name)	紅英
Hua Li yu (The Glossary of Chinese and Foreign Vocabularies)	華夷說語
Kun (Khun)	坤
Kun Wang Qun Xie Ti (Khun Wang Qun Chaota/Setti)	坤望群謝替
Kyo no Uchi ta shrine in Shuri Castle)	京の内
Liang (person's name)	梁
Lin (person's name)	林
Li Pu Shang Shu Wu Ba Luo Mu Ci Sa Tuo Lie (Minister of the Board of Rites Oc Phra Maha Suwanarath)	星把羅摩訶薩陀禮部尚書
Mao Kun (Oc Khun)	冒坤
Nai Chuen Xie Ti (Nai Chuen Chaota/Setti)	奈會謝替
Nai Gou Kosa (person's name)	奈勾歌沙
Nahashū Shi (The History of Naha City)	那覇市史
Nai Men Ying Xie Ti (Nai Boonbiang Chaota/Setti)	奈門英謝替
Nai Noi (person's name)	奈乃
Nai Tie Xie Ti (Nai Tie Chanta/Setti)	奈格謝提
Nai Yang (person's name)	奈榮
Nai Zhang Si Dao (person's name)	乃張思道
Oc Khun Pituk (person's name)	冒坤答陀屋
Oso Kaiki (person's name)	王拍懷院
Qi (formal letter)	啓
Rekidai Hōan (The Precious Documents of Successive Generations)	歷代寶案
Sarsuto (person's name)	察度
Shibukawa Michiyori (person's name)	志布川道頼
Shin Saku Chu (person's name)	田叔舟
The Chronicles of the Li Dynasty (Li Chao Shi Lu)	李朝史錄
The Chronicles of the Ming Dynasty (Da Ming Shi Lu)	大明史錄

Xian Luo Guo (Siam country)	暹羅國
Xian Luo Guan Jiyi (Glossary of Thai-Chinese vocabularies)	暹羅館表語
Xian Luo Guo Wang (the king of Siam)	暹羅國王
Xiao Nai Yue Ben (Chao Nai Htsupun)	蕭奈悅本
Xie Ti (Chaoto-Setti)	謝提
Yang Lo (Emperor Yang Lo)	永樂
Zhang Ren Mi Zan Zhi Dao (person's name)	中人監讀知道
Zheng (person's name)	鄭
Zi (formal letter)	咨
Zi hui (formal reply)	咨回
Zi wen (formal letter)	咨文

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